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ABSTRACT

Murals created by Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros embody a time of change in Mexico. The murals they created were intended to educate an illiterate population. Today these murals embody national pride. The goal of this curriculum project is rooted in learning about the history, culture, and art of Mexico. The project contains four parts: (1) art history; (2) art aesthetics; (3) art making; and (4) art critique. Art history includes discussion of the images seen in the murals, historical information, examination of how the culture is projected in the murals, and the statement each artist is making. Art aesthetics examines how the artists use the elements of art and principles of design. During the art-making phase, students create their own compositions that communicate stories, perspectives, or histories of their community or country. The art critique phase gives students the opportunity to revisit the works of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros for review and write a statement about their own compositions. The lesson plan poses key questions; provides background notes; identifies standards; cites objectives; notes materials needed; outlines strategies; discusses assessment; provides questions for small group and large group discussion; offers an artist's statement; suggests follow-up activities; and lists additional resources and references. (BT)

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Mexican Muralists: Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco

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Curriculum Project
Fulbright Summer Seminar in Mexico 2002
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The Muralists: Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueros

Mexican life and culture is closely linked to the arts. Art is seen in many forms throughout the thirty-one states of Mexico. From the elaborately designed cathedrals and alters housed within to the beautiful and famous weavings of Oaxaca, Mexico is filled with lively colors and abounds with visual stimuli. But the buildings decorated with the murals of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros seem to embody a history and unify a culture through a sense of pride like no other art seen in Mexico.

Murals created by Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros embodies a time of change in Mexico. The murals they created were intended to educate an illiterate population. Today these murals embody national pride. Still a form of education, the images also unify a culture, build an identity, and create a sense of patriotism. It is not a wonder that the creation of murals has continued and is now a tradition of Mexican culture and art.

These artists are considered the originators of Mexican mural art. Diego Rivera the most notable among the three. However, all the murals created by these artists are powerful visual images that are social and historically significant. The *Man on Fire* at Hospicio Cabanas by Jose Clement Orozco symbolizes social struggle, and the world of reality versus the world of the ideal. Many of Rivera's images idealize and monumentalize the native cultures, notably *The History of Mexico* in Mexico City's National Palace. *Death to the Invader* by David Siqueiros alludes to the struggle to gain independence from colonialism.

The goal of this project is rooted in learning about the history, culture, and art of Mexico. The project contains four parts art history, art aesthetics, art making, and art critique. Art history will include discussion of the images seen in the murals, historical information, examination of how the culture is projected in the murals, and the statement each artist is making. Art aesthetics will examine how the artists use the elements of art and principles of design to communicate their ideas as well as use the architecture of the building. During the art-making phase, students will create their own compositions that communicate stories, perspectives, or histories of their community or country. The art critique or evolution phase will give students the opportunity to revisit the works of Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros for review and write a statement about their own compositions.

The muralists have provided a wonderful view of the history of Mexico while not sparing their perspectives or the culture in the process. What a better method from which to begin gaining and appreciation for the culture of Mexico?

Level: 7-12

Key Questions:

-What is a mural?
-Why were the murals created? What role or function have the murals played in Mexican society?
-Who are the artists and which murals did they create?
-What message are these artists trying to send?
-How would you compare and contrast these artists, their styles, and their ideas?
-What facts or ideas demonstrate the message the artists are communicating?
-What examples can you find that show these artists were asking for change in the Mexican political system?
-How would you apply what you learned about the muralists to examining art or murals in your community?
-What objects, ideas, and themes would you organize and collect to communicate ideas about your culture and history?
-What are the similarities between each of these artists and what are the differences?
-What conclusions can you draw about the people of Mexico by examining the works of these artists?
-How would you evaluate and judge the work of these artists?
-Which artist do you feel had the most influence? Why?
-What is the importance these murals have played in Mexican society?
-When were the murals created?
-Who are the people seen in the murals and what is their significance?

Background Notes:

The murals created by Siqueiros, Orozco, and Rivera have shaped a culture and defined an art form. These murals provide a fascinating way to study the history and culture of Mexico. The visual images are a great method for students to examine history and social injustice.

Standards:

Communication:

*Create original works of art that are personal and communicate meaning.
*Evaluate meaning and communication in works of art.

Heritage:

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*Discuss how cultural influence and personal heritage make us who we are.
*Compare and contrast relationships between cultures and their art
*Explore how religion, commerce and politics have influenced the development of art in Mexico.

Application:

*Choose materials, techniques, and processes which will enhance communication of ideas.

Perception:

*Recognize and use elements of art and principles of design to communicate ideas.

Aesthetics

*Use terminology and language to analyze the works of art and recognize the differences between styles, techniques, skills, and expression.
*Interpret the murals by what they see, relevant information, and their experiences.
*Judge and apply criteria for evaluating personal work.

Transfer of Knowledge:

*Make connections to the history of Mexico and the mural paintings.

Objectives

*Gain an appreciation for the history and culture of Mexico.
*Evaluate the meaning of the works of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros
*Understand how cultural influences and personal heritage make us who we are.
*Interpret the murals and determine what message or statement the artists are making.
*Recognize elements of art and principles of design the artists used to communicate their ideas.
*Compare and contrast Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros and be able to define differences.
*Identify symbols or images to communicate ideas about history and culture.

Materials:

Sulphite paper for sketching
Magazines or photos for images
Canvas board or heavy weight paper
Acrylic paints

Strategies:

Part 1:
Put one large print, Diego Rivera's *History of Mexico* or a print that is available, with each group or students or one large one displayed in the front of the class. Have students brainstorm a list of ideas they notice about the picture. The items

can include images or the elements of art and principles of design the artist uses. Then begin going down the list and see if any of the things would tell them the story of the picture. What colors does Rivera use? What may they symbolize? What was his intention to paint figures with idealized shapes and exaggerated colors? Rivera's *History of Mexico* portrays the civilizations of Mexico before the conquest and the struggle of the Natives and Mestizos to gain independence from colonial powers. Mestizos are defined as the people that are a mix of native populations and European. Today this is the majority in Mexico.

Step 2: After a large group discussion distribute prints, postcards, or pictures of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros's work to a small group of students. Distribute a list of questions for students to answer and discuss. Form 1 shows a breakdown of general questions about the work to use with students. When discussion is complete have students present their findings and open the discussion to the large group. Have students examine the historical figures often seen in the work. Discuss the message the artists are trying to make in the murals.

Step 3: When students have finished discussing the work explain that they will have to make an art piece that tells a story, communicates an idea about their community, their history, a social or a political event, heroes, or possibly the environment. The importance of the piece is to have a social or historical significance.

Begin by brainstorming some ideas as a class on the board. This can also include a list of images that would represent their community, political or social issues, historical figures or important historical ideas. Using the ideas on the board build a graphic organizer of images that would support or communicate their ideas. Next, sketch out some options for design, remembering to use the elements of art or principles of design as tools to communicate their ideas.

When sketch is complete and finalized transfer the design to a canvas or heavy paper and begin painting. Upon completion have students create an artist statement to explain their images. See form 2 for a list of questions to use when creating an artist statement

Assessment:

The Muralist Inspired Paintings

Name: Class:

3-Exceeds Standards 2-Standards 1-Standards not met 0-Did not Complete

Presentation and Composition:
Drawing includes symbols or images that help communicate the theme _____
Explain:

A large variety of elements and principles are used to support theme. _____
Painting allows eye to move around the picture. _____
Details added to communicate and support ideas. _____
Interesting and pleasing division of space. _____
Total: _____

Craftsmanship
Sketch lines were drawn neatly and not showing through paint. _____
Mixed colors are clean and bright, not muddy. _____
Painting style expresses the intention of the artist. _____
Superior use of materials in careful and precise manner. _____
Total: _____

Attitude and Effort:
Supported peers through participation in discussion and mastering knowledge of materials. _____
Class time was used efficiently, staying on-task with limited conversation. _____
Self-motivated, independent learner. _____
Cleaned up tools and supplies. _____
Total: _____

Creativity and Originality:
Experimented with a wide variety of images, elements of art and principles of design. _____
Unique, different, not done before. _____
Total: _____

Grand Total: _____

Form 1: Questions for Discussion

Questions for small group discussion using the following pictures:
Diego Rivera: *History of Mexico,* Siqueiros: *From the Dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz to the Revolution-The Revolutionaries Mural*, Orozco: Murals at the Hospicio Cabanas

-What is a mural? What is a fresco?
-Why were the murals created?
-Do you see any of the reasons why murals are created in Rivera's work?
-What images do you see that would support these ideas?
-What do you thing Rivera is trying to communicate in his work?
-What is the artist trying to say about Mexico and what information is the artist giving about Mexican history? What images support your ideas?
-How does the artist create a mood or feeling toward particular figures in the mural?
-What elements and principles does the artist use to communicate his idea? Describe.
-Why do you think the artists would idealize the figures and images in the mural? Are figures foreshortened or exaggerated intentionally?
-What is the viewpoint of the artist toward colonialism? What is the viewpoint of the artist toward Mexican culture and the people?

Questions for large group discussion:

-What role or function do you think the murals have played in Mexican society?
-What message are these artists trying to send?
-How would you compare and contrast these artists, their styles, and their ideas?
-What facts or ideas demonstrate the message the artists are communicating?
-What examples can you find that show these artists are asking for change in the Mexican political system?
-How would you apply what you learned about the muralists to examining art or murals in your community?
-What objects, ideas, or themes would you collect to communicate your culture and history?
-What did the artists have to adapt and change to communicate a feeling or mood?
-What are the similarities between each of these artists and what are the differences?
-What conclusions can you draw about the people of Mexico by examining the works of these artists?
-Which artist do you feel had the most influence? Why?
-What is the importance these murals have played in Mexican society?

Form 2: Artist's Statement

Name:_____ Hour_____

Artists often make a statement about their work to help the viewer understand the art piece. Please answer the following questions in complete sentences with legible handwriting to help your viewers understand.

What is the theme of your picture?

Why did you choose this theme?

What images, ideas, elements and principles did you use to communicate your theme? Explain.

What is the focal point of your picture?

What did you do to make this the focal point of your picture?

What would you like the viewer notice when looking at your composition?

What would you like to the viewer to think or begin questioning after viewing your picture?

Follow-up Activities

Upon completion of work students should present and discuss their compositions to the class in a large or small group session. Students should reflect on what they learned during the project, what they really liked about the project, what they would improve for next time, and review the artists studied. Present a display for the school including samples of student work, the artists' work they studied, and tools and material used to create the masterpieces.

Topics for continuing study:
Emulation project of Frida Kahlo
Folk arts of Mexico
Art of the Aztec

Additional Resources:

Information on all three muralist artists:
http://www.artcyclopedia.com/
http://www.artchive.com/artchive/

Rivera:
http://www.riveramural.org/rivera/home.html

Siqueiros:
http://www.adanigallery.com/Siqueiros/main.html
http://www.ollin.net/art/artists/siqueiros/

Orozco:
http://www2.kenyon.edu/depts/mll/spanish/projects/trejo-zacarias/english.htm

Books:

Pellicer, Carlos. Mural Painting and the Mexican Revolution. Mexico City: Impresora Formal,1995

Rochfort, Desmond. Mexican Muralists. San Francisco: Chronicle Press, 1993.

Rodriquez, Antonio. David Alfaro Siqueiros Mural Painting. Mexico City: Impresora Formal 1993.

Rodriquez, Antonio. Rivera Mural Painting. Mexico City: Impresora Formal 1991

Scholastic Art. Diego Rivera. March 1993, Vol 23: No 5.

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Breve Descripcion Palacio Nacional y Murales de Diego, Postcards and Description Booklet.

Rochfort, Desmond. Mexican Muralists. San Francisco: Chronicle Press, 1993.

Scholastic Art. Diego Rivera. March 1993, Vol 23: No 5.

Thompson, Kimberly and Diana Loftus. Art Connections. Parsippany, N.J.: Good Year Books, 1995

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